

Local Family Lands on TLC

Episode to air Monday

By MORAG MACLACHLAN

At first, the Rev. Kendra Vaughan Hovey did not believe the messages she found waiting for her in her e-mail inbox.

"I was skeptical at first. At the end of each e-mail was contact information. So instead of e-mailing back, I called and it was legit," Hovey, of Summer Street, said last week.

Last fall, the leader of the First Church of Wicca was approached about penning a book on pagan weddings and appearing on The Learning Channel's new series, My Unique Family. Flash forward to February and Hovey has since sent her manuscript to the publisher, Adams Media, with a November release date, and next Monday, Feb. 19 at 10 p.m. her episode of My Unique Family, The Witches Next Door, will air.



The Rev. Kendra Vaughan Hovey and her husband, Tim, along with their children, Alec, 11, and Alana, 9, will be featured on The Learning Channel's new series, My Unique Family, on Monday night.

"It was such an incredible experience. I didn't expect the awareness of who we are would go national," Hovey said. "I wanted to promote religious tolerance. I have no other motive. It will be frustrating if that point doesn't get across."

Hovey said TLC approached her because they were interested in how a non-mainstream church was received in a conservative community. Hovey is a high priestess of Wicca. Wicca, which means witch, is a pagan religion based on the spirit of nature. Wiccans believe the divine is both male and female and therefore pray to the god and goddess.

To Hovey's knowledge, her church and a Wiccan church in Washington state are the only churches of their kind in the country. Usually Wiccans belong to private

covens, she said. TLC chose to send its crews to film Hovey and her family in October, because Halloween is the religion's highest holiday. Called Samhain, Halloween signifies the New Year.

For Hovey, her husband Tim, and their two children, 11-year-old Alec and 9-year-old Alana, being miked and filmed all day took some adjusting. Hovey said TLC's nine-person crew "literally turned the house into a TV studio," arriving at her home at 6 a.m. and sometimes staying until midnight. Each family member sat for four detailed interviews and were asked to participate in numerous OTFs or On the Fly interviews as they went about their day. When exiting the car, Hovey said she and her family would have to wait until the camera was set up to film

them arriving before being able to get out of the vehicle.

Hovey estimates TLC shot about 200 hours of footage while in town. In addition to her family, her parishioners, friends and other Duxbury residents were interviewed. Not all of the feedback was positive and Hovey said the difficult part was not being able to respond to people who spoke out against her church.

"We were at Farfar's one day and one of the crew asked the couple in line behind us if they had heard of the First Church of Wicca," Hovey said. "While my family and I were being filmed outside eating our ice cream and talking about religious tolerance, this couple was only a few feet away talking into another camera about how they wished we would leave town."

This type of backlash almost led to Hovey canceling the shoot altogether. She said right before the crew was set to fly to Duxbury, she called TLC and tried to back out of the show.

"Some of my parishioners were scared and our extended family did not want any part of it. I called them and said they would really have no show. But they told me they wanted to try anyway," Hovey said.

In the end, Hovey said members of her church realized the piece was about religious tolerance and educating the non-Wiccan community. She allowed the camera crews to film during rituals to lay to rest misconceptions about witchcraft and devil worshipping.

"We're churchgoing people just like everyone else," Hovey said. "The god and goddess put this in our lap for a reason. If this is part of the plan, so be it."

Hovey has not seen the episode and will watch it for the first time on Monday

night. My Unique Family, The Witches Next Door, will air on TLC Feb. 19 at 10 p.m.